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Academic Engagement Notes: 2013 International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention

May 23, 2013 | Dr. Robert J. Bunker, Dr. John R. Deni

The annual convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) was held in San Francisco, CA, on April 3-6, 2013. The 54th annual convention theme was, “The Politics of International Diffusion: Regional and Global Dimensions.” This conference was a major academic event with over 1,000 panels and round tables and roughly 6,000 attendees drawn not only from the United States, but from across the globe. In addition, a large exhibit hall ran concurrent with the convention housing both programs of interest and numerous university and private book publishers who highlighted new and forthcoming works in international studies.

For the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), the ISA conference presented an important and ideal academic engagement opportunity to help bridge the gap between academia and the military practitioner—an opportunity not only supporting the mission of the Academic Engagement Program of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), but of the broader USAWC community. This engagement was facilitated by USAWC representatives Richard A. Lacquement, Jr. (Dean, School of Strategic Landpower), Robert J. Bunker (SSI), John R. Deni (SSI), and Marybeth P. Ulrich (Department of National Security and Strategy). These scholars chaired or co-chaired panels, acted as panel discussants, and presented their own research papers on the following panels:

- China: Between Confrontation and Engagement;
- China’s Military: Recent Developments;
- The Future of NATO;
- Global Cities and Global Slums;

- Green Shoots in Spring: Why the Uprisings?
- The Hegemon's Indirect Approach to Asymmetric Conflict and Intervention; and,
- The U.S. Strategic Shift: A New Beginning for European Defense?

In his paper, “Small Footprints and Big Aspirations in U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy and Strategy,” Colonel Lacquement explored American considerations of counterinsurgency policy and strategy as a function of interests, ideals, and instruments. More specifically, his paper examined the tensions of U.S. participation in small and limited wars given American policy inclinations and aspirations to pursue often unlimited aims.

Dr. Bunker provided an overview of recent feral and criminal cities research in his paper, “Feral and Criminal Cities: Contrarian Military Implications for the United States.” He analyzed the implications of the rise of these cities for the U.S. Army and allied forces within the context of over 10 years of foreign counterinsurgency operations and in a time of increasing austerity.

In, “Confrontation or Engagement: The Purpose of U.S. Forward Presence in the Pacific Theater,” Dr. Deni examined the role of U.S. Army forces based in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. He posited that the United States could achieve its national security goals across the vast, diverse theater more effectively and more efficiently if U.S. Army forces were reconfigured—or “rebalanced”—toward Southeast Asia or Oceania, assuming greater, but not necessarily unacceptable, levels of risk in Northeast Asia.

Dr. Ulrich analyzed the role of the Middle East’s military institutions in political transitions in, “The Arab Spring and Arab Militaries: The Role of the Military in the Transitioning Middle East.” She assessed patterns across the region in order to better understand the military’s role in transitions from authoritarian regimes, as well as the likelihood that the transition’s character will be more or less democratic. She would like to advance civil-military relations theory with her argument that the level of military professionalism, often facilitated by U.S. International Military Education and Training program participation, is a critical factor in predicting whether or not militaries will support liberalization away from authoritarian rule.

Attendance at the ISA annual conference benefitted both the USAWC generally as well as the individual USAWC scholars who presented papers, engaged with colleagues, developed new contacts, and contributed to the evolving debate on U.S. national security. The USAWC representatives sat in on diverse panels of interest, including presentations provided by historians,

economists, political scientists, human rights practitioners, and peace studies researchers, and in the process, gained new scholarly viewpoints and contacts. Further, from the perspective of many ISA members, USAWC scholar attendance helped to bridge the civil-military divide by advancing the strategic dialogue with civilian academics and by showing that participation in the conference is of continuing importance and value to the U.S. Army.

Later this year, the Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press will publish Dr. John R. Deni's paper titled, "The Future of American Landpower: Does Forward Presence Still Matter? The Case of the Army in the Pacific."

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